

THURE LUDWIG THEODOR KUMLIEN*

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Concern is expressed that the race will suffer in physical development with the passing of the pioneer. Many lives were sacrificed in homesteading, nor were all who survived physical giants, though courage, perseverance, and endurance were well-developed qualities in them. Pioneering for homes and lands is now past, but intellectual pioneering, the opening of new avenues of human understanding for the comfort and betterment of mankind, will ever be in order. New and unexplored fields of intellectual advancement are ever present, awaiting the enterprise of the pioneer in thought. The field of ornithology has had many eminent pioneers, whose studies of bird life have made valuable contributions to agriculture, or to pure science. One such pioneer in ornithology was Thure Kumlien, of Wisconsin.

Thure Ludwig Theodor Kumlien—he signed his name, Thure Kumlien—emigrated to America after graduating from the University of Upsala, Sweden, in 1843. He was a scholarly young man of unusual ability in literature and the languages of Europe. He possessed also a talent in the direction of science, and even in his college days had received recognition as a botanist and ornithologist. He settled in Wisconsin and found opportunity to follow his interest in these fields.

W. M. Wheeler gives us the following additional facts: "Thure Kumlien was born in Herrlunda Parish, Wester-gothland, Sweden, on the 9th of November, 1819. His father was an army quartermaster and owned and operated several large estates. Thure, the oldest of fourteen children, was early entrusted to a private tutor, soon entered the gymnasium at Skara, and subsequently graduated from the University of Upsala in 1843." (Supplement to the Report of the Trustees of the Milwaukee Public Museum, 1888).

Accompanied by his betrothed, Margareta Christina Wallberg, and her sister, Thure Kumlien emigrated to America in 1843, and, after ten weeks in a sailing vessel, reached America. They went directly to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Thure Kumlien and Christina Wallberg were married on September 5, 1843. They then located about seventy miles from Milwaukee near Lake Koshkonong, where Kumlien bought forty acres of virgin forest from the Government, adding another forty a little later.

His first home, a log house, was near the little town of Busseyville, now called Sumner. The big living room was decorated with

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beautiful water-color pictures of birds and flowers painted by Kumlien while at the University of Upsala. In 1874 a two-story frame house was built on the home site. The log house, standing in the rear of the new home, was removed in 1908.

Kumlien's son, T. V. Kumlien, says: "The region abounded in game of all kinds common to this section. Even buffalo horns were found by the early settlers. The lake was a favorite resort for water



THURE LUDWIG THEODOR KUMLIEN, 1819-1888.

fowl, and these, with the fish and the animals, were new to him [Thure Kumlien]. The grand old forests, as yet untouched by the settlers, were swarming with birds. A great treat was in store for him in the study of the wild flowers which at that time had only been disturbed by the grazing of wild deer. The entomology of this country was an endless source of pleasure to him."

A Swedish Episcopal clergyman, the Rev. Gustav Unonius, who visited the Kumliens in 1845, but two years after the young scientist had undertaken to subdue his piece of wilderness, wrote of him: "It

was quite remarkable to see how he [Thure Kumlein] divided his time between farming and scientific researches. Necessity found [his] hand to the plough and to the hoe, while interest and desire held [his] thoughts on flowers, birds, and insects. A rich herbarium and an ornithological cabinet of no mean importance, but on account of its small capacity, not arranged in order, possibly also bears evidence to a greater field of work as a naturalist than as an agriculturist. It could very well happen that the oxen would be permitted to stand in the furrow a little longer than was necessary for their rest, in case the ploughman's eye accidentally caught a glimpse of some rare insect or of some flower of the field that had not as yet been analyzed. He united with real scientific education also an excellent ability for mounting birds and other animals, and worked in this manner in order to bring himself a small income." (Reminiscences of Gustof Unonius, 1861, in P. V. Lawson's "Life of Thure Kumlein").

Thure Kumlien was no farmer and his family of growing children would not have fared so well had it been dependent solely on the income from the farm. Angie Kumlien Main says that he earned his living by taxidermy and collecting specimens, both of which he did extensively. Many of these specimens are in the State Normal Schools of Wisconsin. His paintings of birds and flowers, most of which were made while he was in the University of Upsala, are in the possession of the family.

In a letter to President Twombly, of the University of Wisconsin, 1870-1874, Thure Kumlien says: "Having gone through the regular course of studies at the schools and gymnasium, I studied four years at Upsala University. In 1842 I made a collecting tour of some of the Islands of the Baltic [Sea] and found many specimens both of plants and birds. Among the latter was a gull that had not been found in Sweden since Linnaeus found it. . . . During the time I have lived in this country (since 1843) I have sent many large collections of birds, insects, etc., to the museums of Leyden, Holland, Prof. H. Schlegel: Berlin, Prof. Peters; Stockholm, Prof. Sundevall: Upsala, Pr. Lilljeborg; and many smaller collections to England and east in the United States; and to the Smithsonian, Philadelphia (Cassin) and to Boston Society of Natural History, of which I have been a member since 1854.

"Of plants I have sent a large collection to Prof. E. Fries, Upsala, among which plants several are by him considered different from those described in our American works. I have consequently had a great

deal of experience in collecting in almost every branch of natural history.”

Among the specimens sent by Thure Kumlien to Professor Elias Fries was a purple aster that grew at Busseyville. It proved to be a new species and was named by Fries “*Aster Kumlienii*”, in 1860.

Ornithologists in the east were well aware of Kumlien’s wide and accurate knowledge of birds, and they sought his aid for the great work, “History of North American Birds”, to which he was a generous and valuable contributor. Mrs. Angie Kumlien Main in a letter to the writer, (1932), says: “I have eighty-five letters written by Dr. Brewer to my grandfather, Thure Kumlien, all asking for information for his great work. He collected for weeks at a time for Dr. Brewer. I have hundreds of my grandfather’s first copy of letters to such men as Brewer, Baird, Samuels, etc., all just teeming with his knowledge. For weeks he waded in the marshes and rushes of Lake Koshkonong to study the nesting habits of yellow-headed blackbirds. Nothing was too arduous for him when he was imparting knowledge of his beloved birds.”

In a letter to Dr. Brewer, Kumlien writes: “I am poor, sir, I have to work hard to support my family and I see money but seldom. I was not brought up to work with make [which makes it] come harder for me; still I can live well here being content with little. I have bought another 40 acres of land and when I get that paid for (nearly 200\$) and some more improved I calculate to let out some on shares and hope I would be able to live, with the addition of some work, on half what the field will yield and then I will have time for birds & flowers of which two things I have been passionately fond ever since a child.”

In another letter to Dr. Brewer he writes: “I am glad to get fifty cents a piece for yellow-headed blackbird skins, and wish I could sell many at that price. It is easier for me kill and skin a bird than it is to go out and work hard for fifty cents a day for a farmer.”

From 1867 to 1870 Kumlien held a professorship in Albion College, located a mile or two from his home, at Albion, Dane County, Wisconsin, where he taught botany and zoology, as well as some of the languages. One of his students shot a strange bird on the campus. On seeing it Kumlien exclaimed: “I have not seen that bird since I was a boy in my native land. It is *Passer domesticus*, or English Sparrow.” It was the first appearance of the bird in this part of the state.

In 1870 Kumlien left Albion College, which was in financial distress, to accept an appointment from the State of Wisconsin to collect and arrange plant and animal specimens for the University at Madison and for the Normal Schools. The University collection was destroyed in 1884, when the Science Hall burned. I well remember that fire, and the repeated expression, "If only Irving's geology specimens and the Kumlien collection could be saved!" Nothing was saved. But the collections he placed in the Normal Schools are probably still in existence.

From 1881 to 1883 Thure Kumlien was employed by the Wisconsin Natural History Society. In 1883 he became Taxidermist and Conservator to the Public Museum in Milwaukee, where he remained until his death in 1888. A recent letter from the Milwaukee Public Museum says that the Museum contains about 400 bird skins, about 700 plants and flowers, and more than 200 fossils, donated by Thure Kumlien. Besides these he donated a large number of insects and shells, also the picture of a turtle painted by him.

A modest reserve made it hard for Kumlien to appear in public. His granddaughter says there is but a single article written by him, "The Disappearance of Wisconsin Wild Flowers", which he read before the Wisconsin Academy of Science. The following paragraph is from this paper. "For the last thirty-two years I have resided in the vicinity of Lake Koshkonong, in Jefferson County, Wisconsin, and have during that time paid some attention to the Fauna and Flora of that locality, and have collected somewhat extensively in nearly all the branches of Natural History, particularly Ornithology and Botany. When first I came here in 1843, a young and enthusiastic naturalist, fresh from the university at Upsala, Sweden, the great abundance of wild plants, most of them new to me, made a deep impression on my mind, but during these thirty-two years a large number of our plants have gradually become rare and even some eradicated." (Trans. Wis. Acad. Sci., Vol. 3, 1875, pp. 56-67.)

It is to be regretted that Thure Kumlien's reluctance to write and appear before the public deprived the world of first hand records from his extensive and accurate studies. Perhaps his scholarly attainments made him feel that it would be humiliating to mispronounce or blunder in verbal construction. His notes on eggs, nests, and birds, were largely answers to requests for information by eastern ornithologists, and were used directly by them. His skill in taxidermy was widely recognized. S. F. Baird, on August 30, 1880, wrote to Thure Kumlien as follows: "Would you consider twenty dollars suffi-

cient compensation for your swan? I shall be very glad to have it as an important addition to the Museum of the Smithsonian Institute." The offer was accepted.

Kumlien made a deep impress on his students, among whom his son, Ludwig, and Edward Lee Greene rank among the foremost. Ludwig followed in the footsteps of his father. Edward Lee Greene became professor of botany in the University of California. From 1895 to 1904 he was professor of botany in the Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C., and later became associate in botany at the Smithsonian Institution. A warm and life-long friendship developed between Thure Kumlien and Edward Lee Greene from the time they first met. A correspondence, which continued for twenty-six years, began when Greene went to the Civil War in 1862. A part of one letter from Greene to Kumlien, dated in 1862, at Ft. Henry, Tennessee, says: "I hope I will be in Albion next spring in time to gather *Arethusa* and *Pogonia* with you from that blessed little tamarack marsh." (Trans. Wis. Acad. Sci., Vol. 24. p. 151.) It was in this marsh that Thure Kumlien discovered a bed of *Linnaea borealis*, so named by Gronovius when Linnaeus found this small, trailing evergreen herb in Lapland in 1732. It is the only species in this genus.

Mrs. Angelia Kumlien Main records the following incident. "In a letter from Berkeley, California, dated January 9, 1885, Mr. Greene, who was then Professor of Botany at the University of California, wrote his old friend Mr. Kumlien that he had just named in his honor *Kumlienia hystricula*. In . . . describing this flower . . . Professor Greene says: 'I gladly dedicate this very characteristic plant of our Sierras to Prof. Thure Ludwig Kumlien, A. M., formerly Professor of Natural History at Albion, Wisconsin, a learned and zealous naturalist, and my first instructor in the science of botany. . . .'" (Life and Letters of Edward Lee Greene. Trans. Wis. Acad. Sci., Vol. 24, pp. 147-185.)

Professor Greene presents an interesting characterization of Kumlien in the following words: "Mr. Kumlien had been, while at Upsala, a very special favorite among the botanical pupils of Professor Elias Fries. How thoroughly worthy the youth must have been of the particular attention of the great Swedish botanist of the nineteenth century was still manifest in Mr. Kumlien when I first made his acquaintance, some sixteen or eighteen years after his arrival in this country. He was then a sort of a second and American edition of Fries. . . . He had, in 1860. . . . so well mastered the extensive and varied flora of southern Wisconsin, that there was no indigenous tree

or shrub, flower, grass, or sedge, or moss or hepatic, liehen or mushroom, the scientific name of which was not at his tongue's end. . . . I am confident that no state in our Union has ever had so complete a master of its whole flora, as Wisconsin had in this extraordinary man . . . whom, with his low stature, muscular frame, rather stooping shoulders, light hair and keen blue eyes, a stranger might have mistaken as he passed along the country roads, for an ordinary farmer from the Scandinavian settlement, who in the most polished society would have been recognized as an intelligent, refined, and almost courtly gentleman . . . whose tongue could address a foreigner in . . . any one of the languages of Europe spoken between Spain and Sweden.

“. . . from boyhood his specialty appears to have been ornithology. It was to the birds . . . that he gave most of his time. Even the fame, which he would not seek, but which was thrust on him at last, was that of an ornithologist. Lake [Koshkonong] is eight or nine miles long and three in breadth. . . . The still and shallow waters, bordered with green fields of reed and wild rice, were twice in each year the resort of great flocks of wild geese, pelicans and swans . . . and the wooded hills and open meadows were . . . the home of . . . spring and summer song-birds, of grouse and pheasant. The building site which Mr. Kumlien chose . . . and where he dwelt to the end of his life . . . [lay] back from Lake Koshkonong, on a pleasant elevation. Oak woods enclosed the place northward and westward; to the eastward lay a stretch of open undulating arable land, suitable for farming purposes. The pristine quiet and seclusion of the place was always retained. . . . One reached the place by either of two by-roads, closed by gates. . . . A little tract of tamarack marsh . . . occupied a deep abrupt depression among the heavier forest some two miles distant northward from the dwelling. . . . Here bloomed many rare flowers, [among them] *Arethusa bulbosa*. This was always in Mr. Kumlien's opinion the very loveliest of all North American wild flowers.” (Pittonia, Vol. I, 1887-1888, pp. 250-260.)

Aside from his contact with scientists Thure Kumlien was not a well known man in Wisconsin. He had been in America more than twenty-five years when W. D. Hoard, later governor of Wisconsin, read in the *Chicago Tribune* that Louis Agassiz of Boston, considered Thure Kumlien of Busseyville, Wisconsin, the greatest authority in the world on bird nests. Hoard, who lived in the same county, had never heard of him, but set out at once to see so unusual a man, and found him plowing his field with a yoke of oxen. Through personal contact the quality and scholarly attainments of Thure Kumlien were

readily recognized. But his modesty held him in reserve, he had to be sought out. Kumlien's house and surroundings, while an ideal laboratory for a naturalist, did at the same time isolate him. He was not on the highway, nor could the house be seen from the road. Large museums, where his life would have had an immediate and natural outlet, were far removed from the middle west. He became an associate member of the American Ornithologists' Union in 1883, the year of its founding. He could not attend the meetings, and his diffidence prevented him from writing for publication. Wisconsin was a pioneer state with the usual hardships. His home was one of joy and peace. He was deeply concerned for the welfare of his family, but was never distressed. The great naturalist, trying to make a living by farming, of which he knew little or nothing, for his family of five growing children, was not annoyed by fretful complaints or distracting worries. Pioneer hardships were met and mastered in that wholesome family. The death of his rare and understanding wife in 1874 left him deeply saddened but wholly composed. Christina Kumlien and her sister Sophia Wallberg, who lived to the age of ninety years, were beloved by all who knew them. As a teacher in Albion College and in all personal contacts Kumlien's knowledge of birds and flowers, insects and mammals, was generously and effectively imparted. He gave directly, always his best, to all who came to learn from him. The name and memory of Thure Kumlien may fade when those whose lives he quickened and encouraged have gone. Thure Kumlien, the eminent scholar, thorough scientist, and rare character, was a great man, and his spirit has enriched the world.

While preparing and mounting bird skins in the Milwaukee Public Museum Thure Kumlien became suddenly ill, due to breathing the poison used in curing the skins. He was immediately taken to the Milwaukee Hospital, where he was attended by the great Doctor Nicholas Senn. He died that day, August 5, 1888, and was buried on August 7 in the home cemetery near Lake Koshkonong.

His life may be summed up in the following quotations from his biographers: "He was a man of most refined tastes, without any of the extravagant desires which such tastes often engender. He was satisfied to live most simply a life which philosophers might envy." (W. M. Wheeler, in the "Necrology", Supplement to the Report of the Trustees of the Milwaukee Public Museum, 1888.) "A purer, nobler type of the naturalist of the reserved and non-advertising class, there was not in his day, in America, than Thure Ludwig Theodor Kumlien." (Pittonia, Vol. I, pp. 250-260.)